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Chinese may fall to third spot soon

by [ho wah foon](#)

THE Feb 8 to Feb 22 Chinese New Year period was set to be an uneventful 15-day celebration with many open houses, but few fresh topics to talk about, until a Feb 14 news report interrupted the monotony of the festivities.

This report on declining Chinese population ratio in Malaysia, peppered with a warning that this ethnic group may slide to the third spot in terms of number and percentage in the country, immediately triggered the alarm.

The active Selangor/Kuala Lumpur Hainanese Association based at Thean Hou Temple was the first to react emotively at its CNY open house.



Pheng: Chinese politicians and community leaders should pay attention to this issue.

It warned that this development would have far reaching implications for the Chinese community on the political, education and economic fronts.

This high profile association and other clans reiterated their calls to the local ethnic Chinese to give birth to more babies.

To recap, a report in *Sin Chew Daily* on Feb 14 stated that by 2030, the numbers of Chinese – the second largest ethnic group after the Malays in Malaysia – would drop to third place after the bumiputra and foreign migrant workers.

A huge fall in the birth rate of the Chinese to 1.4 babies per family in 2015 from 7.4 in 1957 and a sharp rise in the numbers of foreign workers are now threatening the Chinese' position as the second largest grouping in Malaysia.

The report, quoting projected data from the Department of Statistics, said the percentage of local ethnic Chinese population would shrink to 19.6% in 2030, from 24.6% in 2010 and 21.4% in 2015.

The Chinese percentage is also projected to fall further to 18.9% in 2035.

In the report, Chief Statistician Datuk Dr Hasan Abdul Rahman was quoted as saying that even though the Chinese population would increase to 7.1 million people in 2040 from 6.6 million now, the percentage compared to the Malays and Indians might decline to 18.4% in 2040.

In terms of numbers, the other two ethnic groups are projected to rise in population, with the bumiputra outdoing those from other races.

The bumiputra population is anticipated to increase from 19.2 million in 2015 to 26 million by 2040, and Indians from two million to 2.3 million.

In terms of percentage, the bumiputra population is anticipated to increase from 61.8% to 67.5%, and Indians from 5.5% to 6.4%.

Malaysia's population was estimated at between 30.6mil and 30.8 mil at end-2015.

While the decline in the percentage of Chinese population vis a vis the total population is an accepted and irreversible fact, what is unpalatable for the community is that foreign workers will overtake them in numbers and percentage soon.



Lim: Chinese have contributed tremendously to nation building, development and progress.

Recent news reports put the number of legal foreign migrant workers at 2.2 million, illegal and undocumented workers at four million.

Their total is only slightly less than 6.6 million.

With the Government's memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Bangladesh to bring in 1.5 million workers over three years (which is now put on hold), there is no need to wait till 2030 to see foreigners overtaking the Chinese's number in Malaysia.

Tan Sri Pheng Yin Huah, the national president of Huazong (Federation of Chinese Associations in Malaysia), urges Chinese associations and Chinese-based political parties to show concern to this population issue.

“Chinese politicians and community leaders should pay attention to this issue as there will be serious implications for the future generations of the Chinese.

“We hope this generation of Chinese will marry young and give birth to more babies.

“We also hope the Chinese associations and political parties could give incentives and support to the financially-weak families,” says Pheng in a telephone interview.

Chinese-based parties, which derive a lot of political support from the community, should exercise their political influence to stop the influx of illegal migrants, he adds.

But Pheng acknowledges that the community is helpless as far as the birth rate is concerned as getting married and having babies is a personal decision based on many factors.

In fact, the current incentives given by some clans comprising RM1,000-RM2,000 per new born has not had any impact.

Lim Association’s president Tan Sri Lim Hock San, whose family controls LBS Bina Group, pointed out that despite the declining population ratio, the Chinese had contributed tremendously to nation building, development and progress.

“The Government must treat the Chinese in this country fairly due to the vast contributions we and our ancestors have made to Malaysia.

“There should not be extremist statements made against us,” said Lim at Lim Association’s CNY open house.

But can politicians do anything?

“This falling trend in the percentage of Chinese against the total population is a development that no one – even the MCA – can stop,” a former MCA president tells *The Star*.

In fact, as far back as 2003, there were already extensive discussions by Chinese scholars and community leaders on the issue.

As a result of several seminars on Chinese population, a book *The Chinese Population in Malaysia: Trends and Issues* edited by Dr Voon Phin Keong, was published in 2004 by the Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies.

Discussions then were spurred by the noticeable fall in Chinese population ratio to 26% in 2003 from 37% in 1957, though in number, ethnic Chinese had increased to about five million from two million during the period.

Factors for the decline in Chinese population ratio cited in the book included economic reasons, urbanisation, low birth rates, opting to stay single, late marriage, emigration, rising emphasis on quality and small family.

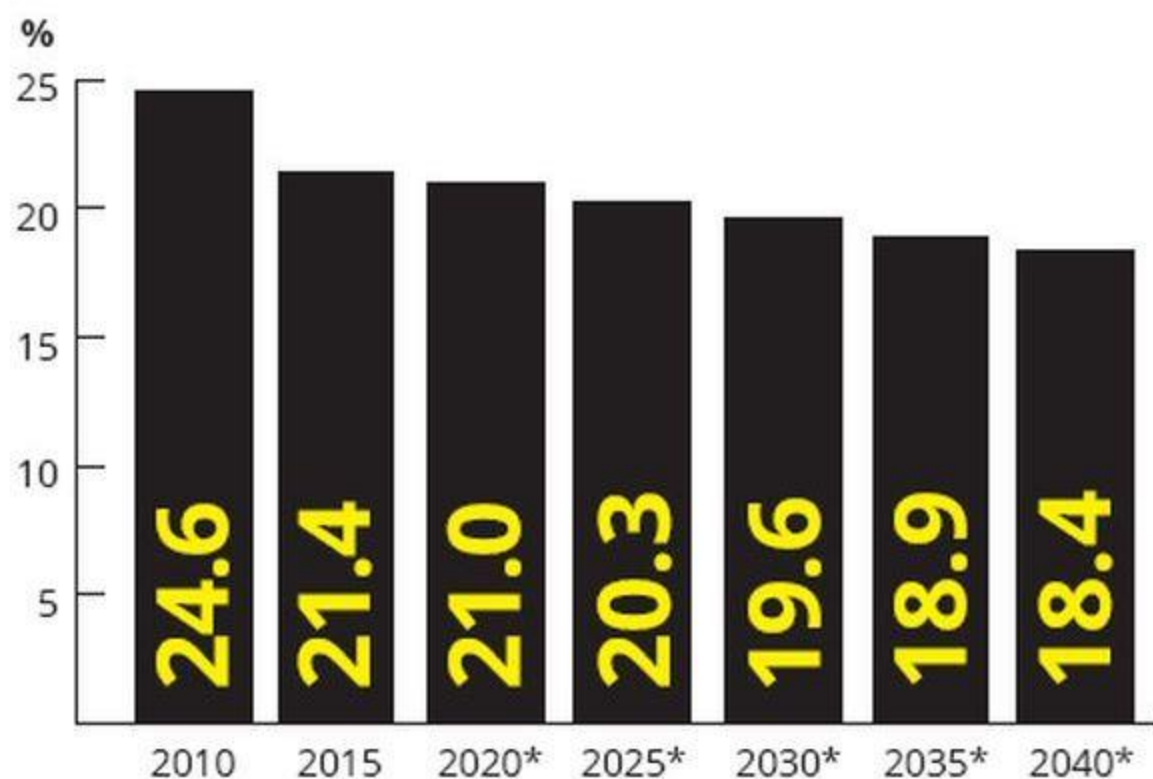
The Chinese population ratio also dropped because the biggest ethnic group – the Malays – were registering higher birth rates and its population was rising faster.

In addition, the Chinese community was also ageing faster than other groups. In the 1991 census, 7.6% of the Chinese were aged 60 and above, while it was 5.4% for Malays and Indians.

With females becoming more emancipated, choosing to work rather than becoming full-time housewives, the Chinese birth rate fell.




According to *Sin Chew*'s commentator Lim Mun Fah, Singapore's "stop-at-two children" policy implemented in the 1960s had an impact on local Chinese due to the country's success in nurturing more elites and talents.

Chinese population in Malaysia



Note: * = projected figure

Average birth rate per family among 3 races

	Chinese	Bumiputra	Indian
1957	7.4	6.1	8.0
2015	1.4	2.7	1.4
			

Source: Department of Statistics

While most of the factors identified in the 2003 are still relevant today, the new and single most important factor that could force down the local Chinese population ratio fast will be the influx of foreign workers.

It is possible that these foreign migrant workers may one day become citizens – as had happened in Sabah.

In the 1960s, Chinese accounted for 23% of Sabah's state population, but in 2003, the ratio fell to 10% although the Chinese number had increased 150% to 260,000 from 104,000.

Due to the small ratio, the Chinese there could no longer be kingmakers in Sabah politics.

As race politics still dominates Malaysia's political scene, numbers are still important in power bargaining.

With the decline in numbers, the representation of the Malaysian Chinese's political voice in recent years has clearly dropped.

But scholars argue that even if the Chinese increased its population, they might not get bigger political and economic power in Malaysia.

While no one can predict what will happen to the Chinese in Malaysia come 2030 or 2040, Chinese parents know for sure that they have to invest heavily in their children's education to nurture them into talents so that they can survive anywhere in the world.

But meanwhile, they expect politicians and community leaders to play their role in safeguarding the legitimate and constitutional rights of the Malaysian Chinese.